

CISTERNs OF SAVANNAH

The following information regarding the cisterns of Savannah, Georgia, is focused on a period of roughly 1830 to 1848, during which time it seems a relatively high amount of progress in the construction of cisterns took place. This process began in 1830 with a proposal for twelve new wooden cisterns to be built in various locations throughout the city, with the purpose of aiding in the fighting of fires. However, it seems these wooden structures were quickly phased out in favor of brick construction. As the work progressed, it appears a standard was developed, as the later proposals detail the dimensions and construction methods to be used. The City Council minutes also began to include charts detailing the condition of the cisterns throughout the city, and it is interesting to compare these charts with the documented process of construction.

1801 – Elbert Square Established:

City of Savannah raised money selling lots around Elbert Square to pay for the construction of cisterns.¹

1824:

In 1824, the first real improvements in fire service took place. An act was passed by the General Assembly in which the City of Savannah was invested with the power to appoint 21 firemen. In conformity with this act, City Council adopted an ordinance for the “prevention and extinguishing of fire” at the City Council meeting held March 11, 1825. Here men were named to form a company to be denoted the “Savannah Fire Company.”²

1830:

“In 1830 twelve large cisterns were built in the squares for the use of the [fire] department.”³

¹ Edward Chan Sieg, *The Squares: An Introduction to Savannah* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company, 1984), 145.

² James E. Chase, *History of Savannah Council no. 1 / The Savannah Fire Department, Illustrated* (Savannah, GA: The Council, 1898), 56. [Georgia Historical Society]

³ Thomas Gamble, *A History of the City Government of Savannah, GA* (1901), 153.

April 8, 1830 (City Council Minutes 1828-1831, pp. 136-7):

Received report from Savannah Fire Company recommending the building of 12 wooden cisterns of not less than 800 gallons each:

Washington Square

Warren Square

Green Square

Columbia Square

Reynolds Square

Wright Square⁴

St. James'⁵ Square

Liberty Square

Franklin Square

Elbert Square

At the pump at St Gall St, Oglethorpe Ward

At the intersecting of McDonough St and the continuation of Whitaker St between Brown and Jackson Ward

Cost of the whole estimated at \$1500.00.

⁴ Wright Square is included on the list of twelve from the City Council Minutes, but it is not listed in the newspaper articles from the following day, which only give eleven sites.

⁵ St. James' Square was renamed Telfair Square in 1883; Sieg, *The Squares*, 56.

April 9, 1830 (Georgian p. 2, col. 1 & Republican p. 2, col. 1):

A communication was received from the Fire Company, recommending to Council the construction of twelve public cisterns in the several squares of the city, and such other places as may be deemed best for the extinguishment of fires. The following are the sites proposed by the Company, for this purpose:

Washington Square, Washington Ward

Warren Square, Warren Ward

Green Square, Green Ward

Columbia Square, Columbia Ward

Reynolds Square, Reynolds Ward

St. James' Square, Heathcote Ward

Liberty Square, Liberty Ward

Franklin Square, Franklin Ward

Elbert Square, Elbert Ward

At the Pump St Gall St, Oglethorpe Ward

At the intersecting of McDounough St and the continuation of Whitaker St between Brown and Jackson Ward

The Company consider the southern, eastern and western sections of the city, which are primarily composed of wood, as particularly requiring means to afford a supply of water for extinguishing fires. They estimate the cost of the whole at not more than 1500 dollars, a sum which would probably be saved by the facilities afforded in the extinguishment of the first fire in any of those sections of the city – and not more than the probable saving in the expense of premiums of insurance in the first six months after the adoption of the measure proposed.

June 3, 1830 (City Council Minutes 1828-1831, p. 148):

Alderman Clark added to the Committee on Fire Department on motion of Alderman Shick *Resolved*. That the said [Fire Department] committee do advertise for proposals to build twelve cisterns.

June 11, 1830 (Georgian p. 2, col. 5 & Republican p. 2, col. 6):

Notice. Proposals will be received by the undersigned committee until the 30th for building 12 wooden cisterns in different parts of the city. Applicants will receive the necessary information on application to:

M. BROWN

GEO. SHICK

JACOB SHAFFER

THOS. CLARK

July 1, 1830 (City Council Minutes 1828-1831, pp. 152-3):

On motion of Alderman Brown:

Resolved. The Fire Department have power to make the best contract in their power with Thomas Askew or Ezra Kent for building and furnishing materials for twelve cisterns in conformity with the resolution on that subject.

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July 12, 1830 (City Council Minutes 1828-1831, p. 159):

Paid Thomas Askew \$22.06 for making cisterns

July 12, 1830 (City Council Minutes 1828-1831, p. 163):

Standing committees approved by mayor:

Fire Department – Ash, Shick, Shaffer

Pumps – Dinsler, Clark, Scudder

November 1831 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 4, p. 140):

City Pumps, Paid J. R. Thompson for cisterns near burial grounds \$10.00

City Pumps, Paid L.J. [?] Bryan for lumber for cisterns \$6.60

March 8, 1832 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 19):

Resolved. The marshal with the City Fire Department is authorized to have the twelve cisterns contracted for by Ezra Kent completed, and with his consent the balance of money which would have been due to him had he performed his contract is to be used in their completion.

May 1832 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 6, p. 26):

City Pumps, Paid F.M. Stone \$75.00 on contract with Ezra Kent for making cisterns

June 14, 1832 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 45):

Resolved. The treasurer be authorized to pay the City Marshal \$338.00 for the purpose of completing the cisterns contracted for by Ezra Kent, the same to be deducted from the amount which would have been due to him had he complied with the contract.

June 28, 1832 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 47):

Resolved. The application of Ezra Kent for payment of the balance due to him for building cisterns be granted upon a statement of his account by the committee, and upon his giving a bond with approved security for the cisterns holding water in compliance with his contract.

June 28, 1832 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 48):

Paid N. B. & H. Weed for nails for cisterns

Paid John Jennison for work on cisterns

July 1832 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 6, p. 35):

City Pumps, Paid P. Cartier \$48.00 for work on cisterns

August 1832 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 6, p. 37-9):

City Pumps, Paid J. Jennison \$14.92 for materials and caulking for cistern in Bolton Square⁶
Paid F.M. Stone \$31.97 on E. Kent's contract, resolved by Council August 9, 1832.

City Pumps, Paid P. Cartier \$1.00 for cover to cistern in Oglethorpe Square

City Pumps, Paid N.B. & H. Weed \$5.50 for lead and tacks

August 10, 1832 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 55):

Resolved. The treasurer be authorized to pay the City Marshal \$31.97 on accounts of Ezra Kent's contract on cisterns.

January 8, 1833 (Republican p. 2, col. 6):

Notice. The undersigned Committee of Council will receive written proposals for the erection of a brick cistern in Orleans square to hold 12,000 gallons of water. The proposals will state the form of the cistern, the time in which it shall be completed, and the names of their securities for the faithful performance of the work. All the materials to be furnished by the applicants.

GEO. A. ASH

JACOB SHAFFER

AMOS SCUDDER

January 10, 1833 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 77):

J. R. Thompson, the pump contractor of the last year, applied for renewal of this contract when it was ordered that notice be given in the public gazette that council will be receiving proposals for keeping the pumps and cisterns in order and that the applicants must state what they will do the same for one year or two or three.

February 21, 1833 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, pp. 85-6):

The proposal of M. Lufburrow to construct a stone cistern of 12,000 gallon capacity, being measured 14' diameter, 10' deep arched with brick stone scuttle [?] walls, 18" thick and 4" on outside to be laid with cement bottom and double course of flag stones, the first course to be laid in clay mortar, outside to be plastered with cement, warranted to hold water for one year from the time this is finished, and to furnish all materials.

Resolved. The proposal of M. Lufburrow for building a brick cistern in Orleans Square for \$450.00 be accepted.

February 22, 1833 (Georgian p. 2, col. 2):

Mr. Lufburrow's proposal for building a brick and stone water cistern in Orleans square was accepted.

⁶ Perhaps another name for Ellis Square?; "'Bolton's Brick Buildings' in Market Square [now Ellis Square] were long the most substantial stores in town."; Walter Charlton Hartridge, ed., *The Letters of Robert Mackay to His Wife* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 290.

April 1833 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 6, p. 80):

City Pumps, Paid Richmond & Butters bill for curb to cistern in Oglethorpe Square \$3.50

November 1833 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 6, pp. 138-40):

City Pumps, Paid John Davidson & Co. \$11.04 for lumber for cisterns

City Pumps, Paid J. Jennison \$123.00 for caulking for cisterns

City Pumps, Paid F.M Stone \$21.75 for work on cisterns hauling clay

July 21, 1834 (City Council Minutes 1832-1837, p. 181):

Proposal from Jesse Mount to build 2 cisterns like that at Market Square for \$440.00 each.

August 3, 1837 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 10):

The Committee on the Fire Department stated that they had received proposals from Frew & Webb, to erect a Brick Cistern in Johnson's Square, which being laid before Council, were deemed extravagant, and rejected.

April 26, 1839 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, pp. 148-9):

Recommend examination of cisterns in Ellis Square, Columbia Square, and Yamacraw.

Recommend that the wood cistern at Bull and Broughton St, being decayed, be filled in and a new brick cistern to be built at Johnson Square.

New brick cistern is recommended for Elbert Ward as old wooden cistern is abandoned.

Fire Committee recommends a brick cistern in Johnson Square to be contracted for after the contracted completion of the cistern in Elbert Ward.

April 26, 1839 (Republican p. 2, col. 2 & col. 3):

Proceedings of Council –

Committee on Fire

Report – That a new brick cistern is now being erected in Washington Ward, by Messrs. Clark and Lufburrow, under contract made with them some time since, for two brick cisterns, one of which has been finished, and is now in use in St. James' Square.

The committee recommend that a new brick cistern be erected in Elbert Ward, the old wooden one being abandoned, and consequently that part of the city left very much exposed; they also recommend that the wooden cistern at the junction of Bull and Broughton streets, being in a decayed condition, be filled up, and a new brick cistern erected in Johnston's square; they further recommend that an examination of the cistern in Ellis square, the cistern in Columbia square, and the cistern in Yamacraw, be made to ascertain their condition, and if any repairs be wanted, that they be put in good order and filled with water.

JAMES SMITH

R.R. CUYLER

MICHAEL DILLON

On motion of Alderman Cuyler –

Resolved. That the Brick Cistern in Johnson's Square recommended by the Fire Committee be contracted for immediately after a contract is made for the completion of that in Elbert Ward.

Resolved. That the Brick Cistern recommended by the Fire Committee, in Elbert Ward, be forthwith contracted for and built.

July 5, 1839 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 168):

Report of the state and conditions of the Cisterns in the City, on the 5th July, 1839

Wright's Square – Brick – $\frac{1}{4}$ [$\frac{1}{2}$?] less full

Green's Square – Brick – full

Reynold's Square – Brick – full

Chippewa Square – Brick – full

Orleans Square – Brick – full

St. James Square – Brick – full

Liberty Square – Brick – full

Franklin Square – Brick – full

Market Square – Brick – full

Oglethorpe Square – Wood – full

Columbia Square – Wood – $\frac{1}{2}$ less full

Warren Square – Wood – full

Yamacraw – Wood – full

Broughton St – Wood – $\frac{1}{2}$ less full

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN HAUPT, Clerk, Savannah Fire Company

April 1840 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 98):

Fire Department, Paid A. Scudder \$300.00 on cistern in Columbia Square.

June 1840 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 118):

Fire Department, Paid A. Scudder balance of \$200.00 for cistern in Columbia Square.

December 1840 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 154):

Fire Department, Paid J.B. Maxwell \$2.75 for cistern tops.

Fire Department, Paid A. Gow \$3.83 for cistern tops.

December 1840 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 170):

Fire Department, Paid A. Harmon \$10.00 for hire of wagon to fill cistern in St. James' Square.

December 17, 1840 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 288):

Resolved. That the Committee on Fire Department advertise for proposals to erect a cistern in Warren Square.

December 25, 1840 (Republican p. 2, col. 6):

Proceedings of Council, December 17, 1840 –

On motion of Alderman Butler, the Committee on Fire Department were directed to advertise for proposals to erect a brick cistern in Warren Square.

1841:

By 1837-38 the City of Savannah was building cisterns in different squares and elsewhere for the use of the fire department. By 1841 there were 30 in existence ranging in depth from 9'-2" to 13'-5". These were kept filled with water and weekly reports of their condition and depth were made to the council.⁷

January 1, 1841 (Georgian p. 3, col. 5):

Notice. The undersigned will immediately receive proposals for the erection of a brick cistern in Warren square. The proposers will state the form, and the dimensions will be the same as those of brick newly erected. All the materials must be furnished by the contractor, and the work must be finished in a specified time and warranted against leakage.

JOHN BOSTON

M. HOPKINS

W. H. CUYLER

⁷ John E. Maguire, *Historical Souvenir: Savannah Fire Department* (Savannah, GA: The Fireman's Relief Fund Association, 1906), 21. [Georgia Historical Society]

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January 14, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 297):

Clark & Lufburrow propose to erect a cistern of best brick in Warren Square, to hold 12,000 gallons of water and to be warranted against leakage, for \$500.00.

C. B. Clusky proposes to erect one in the same square (circular plan) of brick finished in 60 days, of the dimensions of those now erected and warranted against leakage for \$600.00.

It was proposed to defer contracting until the next meeting so as to ascertain the leakage of cisterns now erected.

January 28, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 300):

The Committee on the Fire Department who were to report the proposals made for erecting a cistern in Warren Square reported their proposals:

Jesse Mount to erect an oblong cistern for \$50.00

Clark & Lufburrow to erect a square cistern for \$50.00

C. B. Clusky to erect a circular cistern for \$50.00

Resolved. The proposal of C. B. Clusky be accepted.

April 8, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, pp. 319-20):

Report on cisterns made to Savannah Fire Company, April 2, 1841 (see chart below for details).

Location	Depth of Water	Depth of Cistern	Increase	Decrease
Oglethorpe Square	8' 7"	9' 8"	7"	-
Wright Square	10' 3"	12' 0"	-	-
Reynolds Square	7' 0"	9' 4"	-	-
Washington Square	8' 0"	9' 5"	-	10"
Greene Square	10' 1"	12' 5"	1"	-
Columbia Square	3' 3"	10' 0"	-	3"
Chippewa Square	6' 11"	10' 6"	3"	-
Orleans Square	9' 3"	11' 2"	-	-
Elbert Square	10' 2"	10' 2"	4"	-
Liberty Square	10' 6"	11' 6"	4"	-
Franklin Square	7' 10"	9' 7"	2"	-
Ellis Square	Full	13' 5"	-	-
St. James' Square	7' 0"	9' 5"	-	-
Broughton St	11' 4"	12' 8"	7"	-
Yamacraw	2' 4"	5' 1"	1"	-

May 20, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 320):

Report on cisterns (see chart in Minutes for details).

June 17, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, pp. 338-9):

Report on cisterns (see chart in Minutes for details).

July 15, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 345):

Resolved. That the Committee on the Fire Department have the top part of the cistern in Broughton St dug off and bricked up to a proper height and covered over with three-inch plank, laid in hydraulic cement.

City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives

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July 15, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 346):

Report on cisterns (see chart in Minutes for details).

July 22, 1841 (Georgian p. 3, col. 1 & Republican p. 2, col. 7):

Proceedings of Council, July 15th, 1841 –

Resolved. That the Committee on the Fire Department have the top part of the cistern in Broughton St dug off and bricked up to a proper height and covered over with three-inch plank – laid in hydraulic cement.

Resolved. That the Chief Fireman be authorized to have the new brick cistern in Warren Square filled with water.

July 28, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 349):

Resolved. That the cistern at the intersection of Broughton and Bull streets be filled up, and the Fire Committee be requested to advertise for proposals to build a brick Cistern in Monument Square.⁸

August 12, 1841 (City Council Minutes 1837-1842, p. 352):

Report on cisterns (see chart in Minutes for details).

August 14, 1841 (Georgian p. 1, col. 3):

Notice. Sealed proposals will be received by the subscribers until the 12th (being the next regular meeting of the Council) for constructing a cistern of best burnt brick in St. James' Square, either of a circular or elliptical form, to hold twelve thousand gallons when filled to the spring of the arch. The brick to be laid in hydraulic cement, and the cistern to be warranted tight for one year after it is received from the contractor.

JNO. BOSTON

W. H. CUYLER

November 1841 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 236):

Fire Department, Paid J. E. Walker & Brothers \$165.00 for stone for cisterns.

January 1842 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 254):

Fire Department, Paid A. Scudder \$15.00 for cistern in Washington Square.

January 1842 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 258):

Fire Department, Paid A. Harmon \$12.00 for work on cistern in Warren Square.

March 1842 Treasurer's Report (5600 CT-410 vol. 8, p. 270):

Fire Department, Paid C. B. Clusky's balance of \$28.99 for building cisterns.

⁸ Monument Square is now known as Johnson Square; Edward King, *The Southern States of North America: A Record of Journeys* (London: Blackie & Son, 1875), 369, accessed August 16, 2014, books.google.com/books?id=VQoyAQAAMAAJ.

February 13, 1843 (Republican p. 3, col. 3):

Proposals. The undersigned will receive proposals for building a brick cistern in Anson Ward, Oglethorpe Square. Dimensions to be sixteen feet four inches (16'-4") diameter in the clear, and nine (9') feet deep to foot of the arch. Base of the wall to be three (3) brick and diminish to two (2) brick thick, and two (2) brick thick to foot of the arch, and the arch of brick 9 inches thick, The brick is to be of the first and second best qualities, to be laid in hydraulic cement of the best quality, the same to have a well in the center two (2) feet in diameter one (1) foot deep, mouth and cover of stone, (16) sixteen inches above the ground.

A. N. MILLER

J. BOSTON

A. J. C. SHAW

February 23, 1843 (City Council Minutes 1841-1843, p. 252):

Committee on Fire Department reported it received 2 proposals for building a cistern in Oglethorpe Square

1. Clarke & Lufburrow - \$475.00

2. C. B. Clusky - \$450.00

C. B. Clusky selected and he accepted.

November 26, 1846 (City Council Minutes 1846-1848, p. 100):

Committee on Fire Department reports that they have attended to their duties. During the past year two cisterns of increased dimensions have been contracted at the moderate cost of \$645.00, one at Mill and Joachim St, and the other in Chippewa Square.

January 8, 1848 (Georgian p. 2, col. 5 & Republican p. 2, col. 6):

Proceedings of Council, January 6, 1848 –

Resolved. That the Clerk advertise for proposals for building a well and pump in Pulaski Square, also, a cistern to contain eighteen thousand gallons of water in the same square.

January 11, 1848 (Georgian p. 3, col 6):

Proposals will be received at Clerk's office until Thursday 20th for building a circular cistern with an arched bottom in Madison Square, Jasper ward; to be of good brick, laid in and lined with cement; to contain eighteen thousand gallons of water. Also a well and pump in same square. Time for completion of the work must be specified.

A. C. Davenport

January 22, 1848 (Republican p. 2, col. 6):

Proceedings of Council, January 20, 1848 –

Proposal of Adam Short, for building cistern in Madison Square, Jasper Ward, of best grey brick, laid in and lined with cement, for the sum of \$675.00 [?] was accepted. He is to give security for the faithful performance of said work, to be completed in sixty days.

1871 List & Location of Cisterns:⁹

EAST –

Washington Square (St. Julian & Houston St)
Greene Square (President & Houston St)
Crawford Square (McDonough & Houston St)
Columbia Square (President & Habersham St)
Warren Square (St. Julian & Habersham St)
Reynolds Square (St. Julian & Abercorn St)
Oglethorpe Square (President & Abercorn St)
Madison Square (Macon & Bull St)
Chippewa Square (McDonough & Bull St)
Wright Square (President & Bull St)
Johnson Square (St. Julian & Bull St)

WEST –

St. James' Square (President & Barnard St)
Orleans Square (McDonough & Barnard St)
Pulaski Square (Macon & Barnard St)
Elbert Square (McDonough & Montgomery St)
Liberty Square (President & Montgomery St)
Franklin Square (St. Julian & Montgomery St)
Montgomery St at Harris St
Mill St at Joachim St

⁹ Joseph A. Roberts, *Records of the Savannah Fire Department* (Savannah, GA: 1873), 29. [Georgia Historical Society]